

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 January 1957

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 2-57

SUBJECT: Unrest in North Vietnam*

1. Considerable popular unrest and dissatisfaction with the DRV regime has developed in North Vietnam during the past year. Manifestations of this are the recent changes in the leadership of the Lao Dong Party, the DRV announcement of extensive changes in the administration of its agrarian reform program, and the peasant uprising in Nghe An province. The DRV appears to have misjudged the temper of the Vietnamese peasants and attempted to move too fast in its program of socialized agriculture. The regime has admitted that many of its agents charged with implementing the agrarian reform program and collecting the excessively high taxes were inept, poorly trained and overly harsh in their treatment of peasants, landlords, and businessmen. Although the unrest appears to be most widespread among peasants, the DRV regime has also admitted the existence of dissatisfaction among intellectuals and merchants and a "tense atmosphere" in Hanoi and other urban areas, a situation which they also attributed primarily to improper actions by Communist cadres.

2. Other factors have also contributed to and intensified dissatisfaction and unrest in North Vietnam. Concurrent with their agrarian reform program the Communist leaders also attempted a major reorganization of the rural cells of their party. This led to reassignments, demotions, and purges which alienated many lower ranking party workers. In addition, food shortages and accompanying high prices have continued while news of progress and prosperity in South Vietnam has filtered through to the North. The DRV policy to repress and control the Catholic communities, such as Nghe An, increased Catholic

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opposition to the regime. And the failure of DRV policy with regard to reunification of Vietnam has also had an adverse impact in North Vietnam, especially among the lower party cadres. Despite all these grievances and the evidence of unrest and dissatisfaction in North Vietnam there are no indications that opposition to the regime is organized or that the South Vietnamese or developments in the European Satellites have had a significant influence on the course of events in North Vietnam.

3. In November, the Communist Party (Lao Dong) publicly admitted serious errors in leadership and announced a number of changes in policy and administrative procedures which were designed to correct these errors and to reduce popular discontent. The leaders, apparently satisfied that the "land reform" stage (the purge of landlords and the redistribution of land) was in general completed, were probably also desirous of consolidating their gains and recouping mass support before initiating further steps toward the socialization of agriculture. In addition they were probably disturbed by the lack of progress in raising agricultural output. The reforms followed the general line of the Eighth Chinese Communist Party Congress and, especially, of the 20th CPSU Congress and included: liberalization of laws pertaining to personal liberties, reactivation of the National Assembly, elections for People's Councils at provincial and village levels, and improvements in wages and living conditions "insofar as the financial condition of the government permits." To meet one of the specific causes of agrarian unrest, the special people's courts were abolished and the local agrarian reform committees were divested of their "excessively broad powers" and reduced to research organizations. In addition, the regime promised reinstatement and indemnification to persons injured by the incorrect implementation of the agrarian reform program.

4. Concurrent with the policy changes, there were important shifts in DRV leadership. Truong Chinh, the second-ranking party member and a leading advocate of rapid socialization of agriculture, accepted responsibility for mistakes in implementing the agrarian reform program and resigned as Secretary General of the Lao Dong Party. However, he retained his position as a member of the Politburo. The post of Secretary General was taken over by Ho Chi Minh, who is already Chairman of the Lao Dong and President of the DRV. In addition Central Committee member Ho Viet Thang was demoted to ordinary party member for errors in land redistribution and agricultural policy, and Politburo member Le Van Luong who was demoted to candidate member of the Central Committee for mistakes in the reorganization of the party. These leadership changes, plus the fact that Deputy Prime Minister and Army Commander in Chief Vo Nguyen Giap, rather than Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, played the most prominent role in announcing the new program would appear to indicate an enhancement of Ho and Giap's positions.

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5. We believe the DRV will continue, at least for the next six months, to press measures designed to ameliorate internal conditions and to gain increased popular support. However, because of continued food shortages, scarcity of consumer goods, poorly trained leaders, and pent-up popular resentment, the DRV will probably progress slowly and there will continue to be unrest, disaffection, and possibly, further violent uprisings. We do not expect that anti-regime feeling will approach the magnitude of that in Hungary in the foreseeable future. We believe that the army will remain loyal to the regime, and that the DRV will continue to retain effective control in North Vietnam.

6. Under present circumstances, we believe that there is no necessity to schedule an estimate on North Vietnam before the end of the second quarter.



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